Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A biologically pure strain of *E. coli* which is characterized as comprising an *Hte* mutation and by more efficient transformation with foreign plasmids than *E. coli* that lack an *Hte* mutation.

2. A strain according to claim 1 that has been derived from a strain having the identifying characteristics of ATCC No 55962.

3. A method of preparing gram negative bacteria of improved competence, said method comprising the steps of:

a) transferring a polynucleotide encoding an *Hte*$^-$ region into gram negative bacterial cells; and

b) treating the cells from (a) with a competency inducing procedure

whereby competent cells are produced.

4. A method according to claim 3, wherein said bacteria is *E. coli*.

5. A method according to claim 3, wherein the competency inducing procedure is a standard high competency induction procedure employing the step of washing the cells with a buffer comprising at least two of the group consisting of potassium acetate, KCl, $MnCl_2$, $CaCl_2$, glycerol, rubidium chloride, and hexamine cobalt chloride.

6. A method according to claim 4, wherein said *E. coli* have the genotype Δ(*mcrA*)183 Δ(*mcrCB-hsdSMR-mrr*)173*endA*1 *supE*44 *thi*-1 *recA*1 *gyrA*96 *relA*1 *lac tet*^{R} *Hte**{F'*proAB lacI*^{q}*ZΔM15* Tn10(Tet^R) Amy Cam^R}.

7. A method according to claim 3, said method further comprising the step of freezing the competent cells.

8. Cells according to claim 1, wherein said cells have been rendered competent.

9. Competent cells according to Claim 8, wherein said cells have been made competent by the standard high competency induction procedure employing the step of washing the cells with a buffer comprising at least one of the group consisting of potassium acetate, KCl, $MnCl_2$, $CaCl_2$, glycerol, rubidium chloride, and hexamine cobalt chloride.

10. Competent cells according to Claim 9, wherein said cells have been frozen.

11. Competent cells produced by the method of any one of claims 3 through 7.

12. The use of cells according to claim 11 to clone or subclone heterologous genetic material of interest.

13. The use of cells according to any one of claims 1 or 2 to clone or subclone heterologous genetic material of interest.